

## "I love Skagen Museum"

Patterns of Interaction in the Institutional Facebook Communication of Museums

Laursen, Ditte; Hviid Mortensen, Christian; Olesen, Anne Rørbæk; Schrøder, Kim Christian

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## “I ♥ Skagens Museum”: Patterns of Interaction in the Institutional Facebook Communication of Museums

*Ditte Laursen\**, *Christian Hviid Mortensen\*\**, *Anne Rørbæk Olesen\*\*\**, *Kim Christian Schrøder\*\*\*\**

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### Abstract

Facebook has often been hailed for affording participation and thus for representing an opportunity for institutions to interact with the public. However, research concerning how institutions are actualizing this communicative opportunity is still scarce. In this article, we seek to address this gap by investigating empirically how one type of institution, namely museums, and their Facebook followers, actually communicate. Our approach is innovative in combining analytical tools from speech act theory and Conversation Analysis (CA) to a corpus of activities from the Facebook pages of nine Danish museums of different types and sizes collected during eight consecutive weeks in 2013. This approach enables us to both investigate communicative actions as isolated speech acts and the micromechanics of the interaction that potentially arise from these actions. Our findings indicate that certain kinds of speech act are used more than others and that certain speech acts lead to more interaction than others. By analyzing a fairly standard example of museum/follower interaction, we show how different kinds of micro-conversational dynamics play out. In light of this analysis, we ask what modes of participation the interaction affords and we discuss the implications of our findings for recent debates about how museums can adapt to the participatory paradigm underlying institutional Facebook communication.

**Key Words:** Social media communication, Facebook, speech acts, conversation analysis, institutional communication, museums

### Introduction<sup>1</sup>

In spite of growing competition, Facebook remains one of the most popular and successful social network sites (SNS) in the western world. The site has been hailed for affording participation and thus offering an opportunity for institutions such as museums to interact with the public (Drotner and Schrøder 2013). However, research concerning how this communicative practice actually plays out in practice is still scarce. In contrast, Facebook research has primarily focused on personal and interpersonal communication, mostly in relation to aspects of use, effect and identity/social group formation (Di Capua 2012; Wilson et al. 2012; Pérez-Latre et al. 2012; Bolander and Locher 2010; Boyd and Ellison 2008). Moreover, little research (with notable exceptions, such as Kidd (2014)) succeeds in transcending the ‘often binary understanding of social media as a cause of celebration or concern’ (Drotner and Schrøder 2013: 3-4).

In this article, we seek to address this gap by investigating how one type of institution, namely museums, and their Facebook followers communicate on Facebook. We base our analysis on the public Facebook communication from nine Danish museums during eight consecutive weeks, February 1 to March 31 2013. The analysis demonstrates how a combination of speech act theory and conversational analysis (CA) is helpful for analyzing such interactional practices in online communication (cf. Meredith and Potter 2014; Nastri et al. 2006). This dual approach provides both a framework for categorizing and identifying patterns in the institutional communication on Facebook and tools for assessing the conversational micro-mechanics underlying these patterns.

The article begins with a brief review of research on Facebook communication in general and in the institutional context of museums. We then continue with three analytical sections. The first two sections apply speech act theory to provide, first, a comparison of which speech acts are used to initiate postings by museums and their followers, and second, an analysis of the initiating postings as communicative entities as well as the interaction they enable. We find that certain kinds of speech acts tend to lead to more interaction than others. In the third section, we apply CA in a detailed analysis of one thread of museum/follower interaction in order to better understand different kinds of micro-conversational dynamics. In light of the analysis, we ask what modes of participation the interaction affords. We argue that the overall patterns of interaction display an asymmetrical power relationship and we discuss the implications of these findings for recent debates about how museums can adapt to the participatory paradigm underlying institutional Facebook communication.

## Facebook Research

Facebook has been researched in a variety of ways. However, the research has primarily concentrated on personal use and user related issues (Page et al. 2013; Di Capua 2012; Wilson et al. 2012; Pérez-Latre et al. 2012; Lee 2011; Bolander and Locher 2010; Boyd and Ellison 2008). Boyd and Ellison (2008: 219), for instance, outline the four focus points of SNS research to be 'impression management and friendship performance, networks and network structure, online/offline connections, and privacy issues'. Di Capua (2012: 37) identifies eight main research themes, namely 'effects on the users, friendship, construction of impressions, privacy, use, Facebook and politics, self-expression and construal, social capital, and the merging of social spheres'. In a similar vein, Wilson et al. (2012: 203) classify the existing Facebook research within the following five categories: 'descriptive analysis of users, motivations for using Facebook, identity presentation, the role of Facebook in social interactions, and privacy and information disclosure'. As these topics reveal, Facebook research has focused on personal and interpersonal matters, mostly in relation to use, effect and identity/social group formation.

The research presented in this article is distinguished from these typical research topics in seeking to add to our understanding of Facebook communication as an interactional entity of interest in itself (cf. Meredith and Potter 2014). Also, we do not focus on personal or interpersonal matters, but on institutional communication, namely the communication between an institution, the museum, and its followers.

## Facebook Communication as Conversation and Speech Acts

Facebook communication can be argued to be inherently interactional (Avery et al. 2010; Smith 2010; Meredith and Potter 2014). Meredith and Potter (2014) suggest using CA to analyze this type of digital interaction, whether asynchronous or synchronous, and argue that SNS data should not just be seen as a resource for understanding people but as a topic in itself. Frobenius' and Harper's study is one of the rare examples which considers Facebook communication in this way. They use CA to investigate the interaction and to identify aspects of organizational mechanisms that are enacted through cohesion-building practices (Frobenius and Harper 2015). Below, we similarly use CA as a method to understand Facebook communication as action and the conduct and praxis underlying it (Meredith and Potter 2014; Pomerantz and Fehr 2011; González-Lloret 2010). We use this approach to supplement more descriptive findings obtained by considering communicative actions on Facebook as speech acts. Even though they are not entirely similar in assumptions and scope, speech act theory and CA are shown to be a beneficial combination. For instance, in our analysis we do not only view speech acts as static and dependent on the speaker as done in classical speech act theory, but also as emergent in the conversation, corresponding to a central assumption of CA (González-Lloret 2010). This dual approach provides both a framework for categorizing and identifying patterns in the institutional communication on Facebook, and tools for assessing the conversational micro-mechanics underlying these patterns.

Speech act theory has previously been used singlehandedly to characterize and identify communicative patterns in relation to various media contexts, including away-messages in instant messaging (Nastri et al. 2006) and Facebook (Carr et al. 2012). For instance, Carr

et al. (2012) analyzed 204 status messages created by 46 participants over 14 consecutive days. Their analysis showed that status messages were most frequently constructed with expressive speech acts (60 per cent), followed by assertive speech acts (39 per cent). 6 per cent of the messages were constructed with directive speech acts and 3 % with commissive speech acts (see definitions of speech acts in Table 2 below). Also, they found humor to be an important aspect, being integrated in 21 per cent of the status messages (Carr et al. 2012). Another study (Ilyas and Khushi 2012), analyzing 171 status updates by 60 participants over five consecutive days, also demonstrated that status messages are most frequently constructed with expressive speech acts, followed by assertive and directive speech acts (Ilyas and Khushi 2012). The findings of these studies of interpersonal communication on Facebook are not surprising, since Facebook, being an SNS, is precisely designed to support social interaction and interpersonal exchange (Donath and Boyd 2004; Boyd and Ellison 2008; Carr et al. 2012; Nastri et al. 2006). Expressive speech acts and humor serve well in this regard (Carr et al. 2012). These results, however, cannot simply be transferred to practices of institutional Facebook communication.

### ***Institutional Communication: Facebook in a Museum Context***

The 'participatory paradigm' enabled by the current media environment is reshaping the opportunities through which people can participate in society (Livingstone 2013). In the domain of museums, the participatory paradigm was highlighted by Simon (2010) and the transformation of our understanding of heritage in a participatory culture driven by social media was further developed by Giaccardi (2012). Many museums have – more or less voluntarily – reoriented themselves in response to this participatory media environment. Thus, museums in a transmedia world (Kidd 2014: 23) must operate on multiple platforms, and they do not really have a choice about being on social media or not. To not be seen to engage with interested followers on social media such as Facebook will unavoidably cast a museum as being stuck in a past of self-sufficient curatorial wisdom.

Additionally, to have a conversation with followers on Facebook offers the museum new, strategically applicable information about its surrounding community: through social networking sites the obvious existing relationships of one-to-one (i.e. interpersonal communication), one-to-many (i.e. one-way mass communication) and many-to-many (i.e. participatory, dialogic communication) (Jensen 2010: 71ff) can be supplemented by many-to-one relationships, in the form of followers automatically supplying the museum with information about audience concerns and interests that can be used to monitor its public performance (Jensen & Helles 2016).

Today, therefore, with the proliferation of social media, a museum's digital presence is no longer confined to its own website (Gronemann 2014; Kidd 2014; Proctor 2010). The literature on museum communication on Facebook, or on museums and social media generally, falls roughly in two categories: On the one hand there are pragmatic accounts of best practice (Atkinson 2011, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c; Billings 2009a, 2009b, 2009c; Fletcher and Lee 2012; Gronemann 2014; Grøn et al. 2013; Holdgaard and Simonsen 2011; Pett 2012; Stuedahl 2011; Wong 2011); on the other hand there are theoretical accounts of the potential of social media for museum communication (Capriotti and Pardo 2012; Drotner and Schrøder 2013; Giaccardi 2012; Kidd 2011, 2014; Mancini and Carreras 2010; Proctor 2010; Russo and Peacock 2009; Russo 2011; Russo et al. 2006, 2007, 2008; Sánchez Laws 2015).

Within this body of literature there is a consensus about the promise of social media for enabling museums to engage in conversation with online followers and even to facilitate conversations about museum content between followers. However, several studies find that museums in general take a monological approach to communicating on social media (Capriotti and Pardo 2012; Fletcher and Lee 2012; Schick and Damkjær 2013; Holdgaard 2011; Kidd, 2011, 2014; López et al. 2010; Russo et al. 2008) and thus do not realize the potential for interaction: 'most museums remain slow to recognize their users as active cultural participants in many-to-many cultural exchanges and therefore social media have yet to make a significant impact on museum communication models, which remain fundamentally one-to-many' (Russo et al. 2008: 23). In contrast, a recent study of the social media communication of 22 natural

history institutions (museums, zoos, science centers and aquariums) found that these institutions now take a more diverse approach to Facebook, with different communicative initiatives, which receive a fair amount of response from the users (Gronemann 2014). More recently Kidd found that only 30 per cent of UK museum posts on Facebook and Twitter were conversational in tone, while 70 per cent were closed responses, hardly facilitating conversation (2014: 48). Sánchez Law (2015) also found that the flow communication from the museum to the community is still the norm, despite new opportunities for user 'talk back' via social media.

### Data and Method

Our data sample consists of Facebook threads from nine Danish museums and their followers during eight consecutive weeks, February 1 to March 31 2013 (see Table 1).<sup>2</sup>

NO.	MUSEUM	TOPIC	NUMBER OF ONSITE VISITORS (2013)	NUMBER OF PAGE LIKES (28.11.13)
1	National Gallery of Denmark, Copenhagen	Art	355,835	19,523
2	Museum of Modern Art, Aalborg	Art	92,092	5,121
3	Faaborg Art Museum, Faaborg	Art	25,521	422
4	National Museum of Denmark, Copenhagen	Cultural history	727,727	11,435
5	Marstal Maritime Museum, Marstal	Cultural history	67,026	491
6	Give-Egnens Museum, Give	Cultural history	15,759	281
7	Odense Zoo, Odense	Natural history	381,439	9,736
8	Natural History Museum of Denmark, Copenhagen	Natural history	176,890	1,645
9	Geomuseum Faxe, Faxe	Natural history	12,295	213

*Table 1. The data sample: nine Danish museums. The number of onsite visitors includes repeat visitors.*

The nine museums were selected to achieve maximum variation, enabling us to compare and contrast different settings in the museum context (Patton 1990). The museums vary in relation to two criteria:

- 1) The museums are about different topics. In a Danish context, museums are typically divided in three categories: Art museums, cultural history museums and natural history museums. We therefore selected three of each. In line with Falk and Dierking (1992: xiii), we adopt a broad definition of 'museum' that also includes a Zoo as a museum of natural history.
- 2) The museums are of different size with respect to numbers of visitors and numbers of likes on Facebook: Our sample thus includes big museums with more than 300,000 visitors a year and the highest number of 'likes' from 9,736 to 19,523 (museums

1, 4 and 7); small museums with less than 50,000 visitors a year and with small amounts of 'likes': from 213 to 422 likes (museums 3, 6 and 9); and medium-sized museums having between 50,000 and 300,000 visitors and 491 to 5,121 'likes' (museums 2, 5 and 8).

In addition to these criteria, we checked that the museums actually had active Facebook profiles. However, the level of activity varied greatly: While some profiles had almost daily postings and lengthy conversations, others could be inactive for rather long periods of time.

We gathered the data during eight consecutive weeks in 2013 by means of a digital collection service called 'Digital Footprints', developed at University of Aarhus, Denmark (digitalfootprints.dk). The service uses Facebook's API and collects data into a database. Our screenshots are from this database. While the service generally allows collection and preservation of Facebook data, the service also has some drawbacks (Laursen et al., 2013). For instance, the service is only able to collect threads initiated by museums. Therefore, for user-initiated threads we had to supplement this data source with the online live version of Facebook. In addition, the service does not collect material from links external to Facebook. In these cases, we have relied on the online version, or the Danish webarchive *Netarkivet*. We have noticed that the material we have collected has been subject to small changes in the live version online after our collection. For instance, some posts have been deleted by users. And some posts have received a very delayed response, not captured in our collection.

Also, our study is limited to material that is publicly available on Facebook. We did not have access to information about who represented the museum on Facebook, the backend of the museum Facebook pages or any internal documents regarding policies and strategies for communicating on Facebook. A museum might have a policy of replying to user requests in emails or via the personal message function of Facebook, a form of interaction not covered by our approach. Correspondingly, in relation to the Facebook followers of the museums we did not collect any additional information beyond what appeared on the Facebook pages of the museums (i.e. name and profile picture). Thus we cannot say anything about the demographics of the users participating.

The authors first analyzed the data individually, then collectively, in order to obtain 'investigator triangulation' (Denzin, 1970), thereby removing potential biases and ensuring agreement about the coding. The data was analyzed in accordance with our interpretation of traditional speech act definitions, building on Searle (1969) and Baron et al. (2005). Table 2 summarizes our definitions of speech act categories used in the study:

SPEECH ACT	DEFINITION
Directive	Utterance designed to get the recipient to take a particular action
Assertive	Informative utterance, a statements of fact, getting the recipient to form or attend a belief
Expressive	Emotional utterance used to express emotions and attitudes about a state of affairs
Quotation	Utterance not originally produced by the sender.
Declarative	Utterance designed to change reality in accordance with the proposition of the declaration, e.g. baptisms, pronouncing someone guilty, etc.
Commissive	Utterance that commits the speaker to do something

Table 2. The speech act categories used in the study

Although postings could contain more than one sentence, and a sentence could be categorized as more than one speech act, each posting has been assigned to a primary speech act category.

We selected one of the threads for further examination by means of conversation analysis. This posting was selected as it represented a fairly standard example of museum/follower interaction. In this analysis, we follow the common analytical procedures of conversational analysis, i.e. an examination in detail of how participants in sequentially unfolding interaction, moment by moment, produce and display their understandings of each other's actions in the situation (Sacks 1992; Sidnell & Stivers 2012).

## Findings

### General Findings about Initial Postings

Our first and basic finding about the speech acts used for first postings is that museums initiate interaction more often than their followers. A basic count shows that the museums initiate interaction almost five times as often as their followers (82 per cent versus 18 per cent of the sample). On two of the museum pages, follower-initiated interaction was not even enabled (Museums 8 and 9, see Table 1). However, there are differences across the nine museums: Give Museum initiated much more interaction than their followers, while the followers of the Odense Zoo page were almost as active as the museum (see Figure 1)

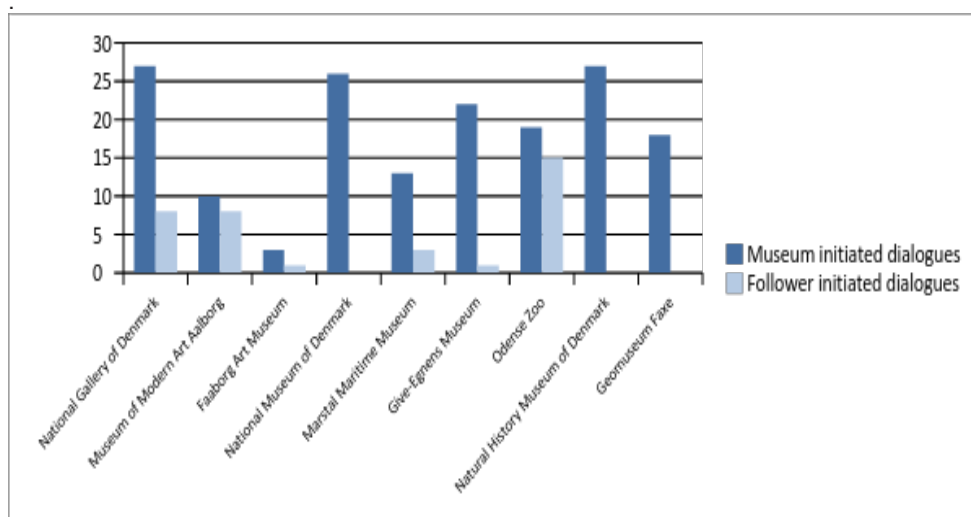


Figure 1. The nine museums and their followers as initiators of threads

Our second basic finding has to do with the types of speech acts posted by the museums and by the followers. Among the six types of speech acts, we found that the speech acts most commonly used by the museums as well as by their followers were directives, assertives and expressives (see Table 3).

	Museums	FOLLOWERS	Total
Directives	75	20	95
Assertives	64	7	71
Expressives	17	5	22
Quotatives	8	3	11
Declaratives	1	0	1
Commissives	0	1	1

Table 3. The number of speech acts used by museums and followers



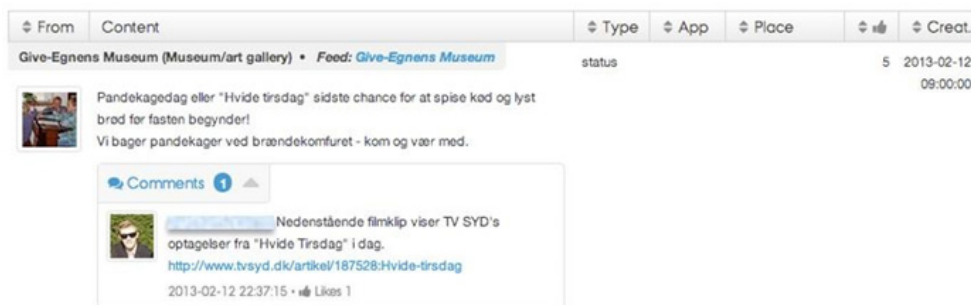
Since directives, assertives and expressives make up 94 per cent of the postings, the following sections concentrate on these three types.

### **Speech Acts in Initiating Postings and their Responses**

#### **Directives: Museums' Initiating Postings and Followers' Responses**

When the museums initiate postings in the form of directives, they are primarily used communicatively as invitations or requests for participant assistance or contribution. Invitations are typically invitations to receive additional information or invitations to experience the physical museum, i.e. Pancake day or 'White Tuesday': last chance to eat meat and white bread before the fast begins! We are baking pancakes on the burning stove – come and join us (Example 1)<sup>3</sup>.

#### **Example 1: Directive speech act as invitation to visit an exhibition.**



Typically, these invitations get no or minimal response from the followers. They can respond minimally with 'likes', but only a few do so: Example 1 gets 5 'likes'<sup>4</sup>. Similarly, comments are rare. Example 1 does in fact get a comment, but this comment is actually a comment by a museum employee, and it reads as an addition to the initiating posting ('This clip shows TV South's footage from "White Tuesday" today'). The minimal responses from followers can be seen as communicatively appropriate in light of the fact that the invitations are produced by the museums as institutional one-way communication and are not perceived by followers to require a verbal response. Followers may, however, respond by doing something, for instance by visiting the museum.

In contrast, when museums use directives to request participant assistance or contribution, they often prompt a more vivid interaction. In one case, the museum asks for help in locating a lost teddy bear's owner, and several followers participate in the ensuing interaction, with help and advice:

#### **Example 2:**

*KUNSTEN Museum of Modern Art:* It's teaming with kids on winter holiday and they are deeply involved in our workshop, our treasure hunt and our exhibitions. Sara-Sofie has been so involved that she has forgotten her teddy bear (which luckily has a name tag). Do you know Sara-Sofie or do you know somebody who does? If so, we guard it and it can be picked up at the reception [picture of teddy bear].

2a: It looks like a build-a-bear. If Sara Sofie does not pick it up, you can drop it at the build-a-bear shop. The bear has a barcode inside and the store can open the bear and if it is registered they have her address and can contact her so she can get the bear again. Build-a-bears are super smart in that way : -) [4 likes]



2b: But the kid does have a good taste in art ;-) [0 likes]

2c: I may know her grandma :-) I'll try. [0 likes]

2d: Hi everybody. I know her :-) because she is my four-year-old daughter. Nice that Molly [the bear] thought that Kvium [the modern painter] was so exciting that she had to stay an extra day. And thanks, we will pick her up at your place! [6 likes]

*KUNSTEN Museum of Modern Art*: Nice [name of follower D] Just stop by. [0 likes]

In this example, the museum's posting prompts a conversation with several participants, who do not only respond to the museum but also to each other (e.g. Hi everybody). The participants are focused on solving the problem of locating the owner of the teddy bear, and the attempted humorous spin on the situation by follower 2b elicits no response. In another example, the museum's request is of a more professional nature:

### Example 3

*National Museum of Denmark*: We have a photo that 'Church Thomas' thinks may be a chapel in a hospital or the like. Is there anyone with local historical knowledge who can help – and is ready for a round of church spotting?

This example displays humor in the use of the nickname 'Church-Thomas' - apparently denoting an expert on church architecture who is known in the museum community. The posting presents the witty neologism 'church spotting', playing on the more well-known activities of plane and train spotting. No followers respond directly to the humorous elements of the posting, but a large number of followers take up the challenge of identifying the church and the lengthy interaction is very engaged. The followers direct their posts both to the museum and to each other, and as a result of their discussion (40 posts), in which the museum participates with additional information, the chapel is eventually identified.

### **Directives: Followers' Initiating Postings and Museum Responses**

Directives in initiating postings by followers are used for a different communicative purpose, namely to request information. These requests may concern practical information:

### Example 4

*Faaborg Art Museum follower*: Is it correct that the museum isn't open on Mondays during the winter holidays?

The followers' directive requests may also originate in a need for more professional information:

### Example 5

*Odense Zoo follower*: How many lions do you have and have you always had lions? Our family are just discussing this and we are eagerly awaiting the answer!

Noticeably in these cases, the museums do not respond, or their response is delayed: In Example 4, about Monday opening hours during the winter holidays, the museum responds after 17 days, more than two weeks after the Monday in question. Similarly, the family in Example 5, who 'eagerly' waited for the answer about lions, must wait until the following day. In general, therefore, museums seem to be a lot more active in the interaction which they themselves initiate, while follower-initiated postings either get no or a delayed response.

**Assertives: Museums' Initiating Postings and Followers' Responses**

Museums' initiating assertive postings are primarily used to inform about factual matters. These postings typically communicate facts about the museum's initiatives, i.e. new exhibitions, or flag the museum's uniqueness in some respect, giving details and special features of artifacts or exhibitions. Another subtype reports from 'behind the scenes' about the daily life at the museum.

**Example 6: Assertive as factual information**

*[The Maritime Museum of Denmark: The Maritime Museum expands its collection of ships with a center section of a caroliner. The ship is part of the museum's new exhibition about Hans Christian Christensen's shipyard. The opening of the exhibition is in late February]*

6a: when can we come down and see it? :) [0 likes]

6b/*Maritime Museum*: 6a. We do not have an opening date of the new exhibition yet, but if you come by in March, we are definitely ready. Remember that even if we are building the exhibition, the museum is open on weekdays from 10 to 16 and 11 - 15 on Saturdays until April 30 [0 likes]

6c: It is an absolutely super museum. Especially when you have it all for yourself ,,,0) [2 likes]

6d: have not been there. but would like to [0 likes]

6e: I have been there many times but am not sure I will go there again, hoping it, but the problem is that I live in Scotland [0 likes]

6f: Yes 6c. The advantage is that we can stop by in the winter and we can dream and philosophize a little in peace and quiet about the lovely time that never comes back, but it's also what justifies the Maritime Museum and gives a reward to the many volunteers who provide giant efforts. [0 likes]

This post is centered on specific facts of a new acquisition and a new exhibition, and the mention of the opening is only vaguely directive. Postings in the category 'daily life report' are sometimes fairly matter-of-fact, sometimes more humorous, as example 7:

**Example 7: Assertive as humorous daily-life report**

*The National Gallery of Denmark*: Time to get a hairdo! Apollo Belvedere has been under our loving care after his hair got a little brused [sic] during transport. Luckily, the curls are now back in place :-)) [picture of sculpture, with the text: 'Apollo Belvedere gets his hair done by stucco worker Peter Funder. During a journey, he lost a bit of his hair, but now the curls are back in place']

7a: Bruised not brused fire the guy who wrote that [0 likes]

7b: Oops, that's really an embarrassing mistake. I am very sorry. Have a nice evening! Best wishes, Sarah [1 like]

7c: traitement anti Poux? [0 likes]

[ ... ]

Typically, museums initiating assertive postings prompt follower responses in the form of acknowledgements, follow-up questions and general assessments. Examples 6 and 7 get acknowledgements from followers in the form of 'likes', sharings and comments. There are several follow-up questions like 'when can we come down and see it?' (6a). The humorous Example 7 gets a humorous follow-up question in French: 'Traitement anti poux? (Head lice treatment?)' (7c). Except for the joking question in French, such follower questions are all answered by the museums. Interestingly, general assessments are the most common type of follower response: 'It is an absolutely super museum' (6c). Again, the museums respond, with 'likes' that recognize the contributions of their followers. Thus, museums' initiating assertive postings prompt responses from followers and sometimes lengthy conversation. Another indication of the museums' engagement is the quick apology for a spelling error by a museum employee, who identifies herself by name (7b).

### ***Assertives: Followers Initiating Postings and Museum Responses***

Followers also make use of assertives in their initiating postings. However, their assertives are used for different communicative purposes. While museums inform about the museum's initiatives, followers report from their museum experiences:

#### **Example 8**

*Follower of KUNSTEN Museum of Modern Art:* And people are still flowing to the exhibition [picture of exhibition full of people]

Noticeably, if museums respond at all to these kinds of postings, their responses are delayed. Nonetheless, these kinds of postings often get quick responses from other followers. For instance, Example 8 is posted at 8:53 pm, and another follower responds at 9:13 pm: 'The Kvium exhibition is fantastic!' In addition, ten followers like the posting.

Followers may also employ assertives to provide information to the museum. For instance, a follower of the Facebook page of Marstal Maritime Museum makes a long posting with a detailed expert-like observation about the possibly wrong placement of a cup-marked stone from the Bronze Age. The posting does not get any response from the museum. In our sample this is the typical pattern for follower-initiated assertive postings. However, as above, other followers may respond. In this example, other followers support the suggestion that the removal of the stone is a mistake. While museums sometimes request (expert) information from the followers in their initiating postings (cf. the section above on museum initiated directives), they apparently tend to overlook follower-initiated informative postings

### ***Expressives: Museums' Initiating Postings and Follower Responses***

Museums' initiating expressive postings are primarily used communicatively to express enjoyment and/or personal reflections prompted by their own exhibitions or other museum related activities:

#### **Example 9**

*Faaborg Art Museum:* A day like today - with sharp spring sunshine - I come to think of Fritz Syberg's painting 'The first day of spring. Anna Syberg and their son Ernst' from 1910. Spring, dazzling sunshine and crisp fresh air. Have a nice day [picture of the painting].

Typically, expressive postings by museums prompt follower acknowledgements and second assessments. For instance, in Example 9, 94 followers 'like' the posting, and there are two follower comments: *A very beautiful picture, I like it very much*, and *Fantastic picture*. In turn, museums acknowledge these responses, with 'likes'.

### ***Expressives: Followers' Initiating Postings and Museum Responses***

Followers also make use of expressives in their initiating postings. However, their expressives are different, as they mainly use them to review their experience at the museum:

Example 10

*Follower of Odense Zoo:* Free access sponsored by Energy Funen is awesome. However, one criticism to Odense Zoo about sending zookeepers home early on the weekend despite the extended opening hours. Several animals were locked away, and the lions were so far away that we couldn't see them. Shame on you!!! So many people were disappointed....

This type of postings gets no response from the museums. Sometimes other followers acknowledge such postings with a 'like'.

### **Summary of the Analysis**

To sum up, directive speech acts are used the most by both museums and followers in their initiating postings. Museums use these speech acts as invitations to receive additional information or invitations to experiences at the physical museum. There are no or minimal response from followers to these invitations. However, when museums use directive speech acts to request participant assistance or contribution, followers respond with follow-up questions and a conversation occurs across museums and followers. Followers use directives to request information. These requests often get no or delayed responses from museums.

The second most used type of speech acts, assertives, is used by museums to post statements of facts and to report about the museum's initiatives, i.e. new exhibitions or uniqueness, details and special features of artifacts or exhibitions and behind the scenes accounts from the daily life of the museum. These posts are responded to by followers with acknowledgments, follow-up questions and general assessments, and sometimes receive further comments by the museums. Followers use assertives to post reports, i.e. accounts of museum experiences, and provide information. Often these posts lead to interaction with other followers. However, the museums tend to not respond or to post delayed responses.

The third most used type of speech act, expressives, are used by museums to express enjoyment of their own exhibitions or other activities. These posts lead to acknowledgments, follow-up assessments and supplementary information by followers, which again are often acknowledged by the museums. Followers use expressives to post reviews of their museum experience. These posts are often acknowledged by the museums, but lead to little interaction with other followers.

### **Conversational Dynamics on Museums' Facebook Pages: Analysis of one Conversational Thread**

#### ***The Premises and Motivations Underlying Museums' Facebook Conversations***

As noted above, some speech acts lead to more interaction than others. In the following, we analyze one example of museum/follower interaction that can be characterized as fairly standard in order to better understand the micro-conversational dynamics. The initial post is an assertive speech act, found on the Facebook page of a Danish art museum.

In our empirical data there are very few examples of a first conversational turn remaining the only turn i.e. not followed by at least one or more 'likes'; but there are also many cases where extended conversational turn-taking takes place, composed of verbal utterances interspersed, significantly, with participation and goodwill signals in the form of 'likes'. We hope that our analysis may illuminate, if not 'best' then 'good' practice for the conversational mechanisms that will lead to meaningful interaction between museums and their followers on Facebook.

First we take a brief hypothetical look at the premises and motivations which shape museum/follower conversations on Facebook. Among the important conversational premises

are the following: the museum does not know the followers. Conversely, the followers know neither the people behind the museum's Facebook voice, nor each other. This means that the shared 'horizon of relevance' between museums (in this case: an art museum) and their Facebook followers is characterized by a low common denominator, which can be characterized along the lines of 'we are all art lovers', 'we are enlightened and open-minded people', 'we are potential visitors to the museum', etc.

In the absence of reception-analytical information, and drawing on uses-and-gratifications based research about people's general motivations for using social media (Whiting and Williams, 2013), we believe that the presence of the followers on the museum's Facebook page is motivated by a mixture of reasons, such as the need to be informed about current exhibitions and publicity initiatives; another reason may be a desire to belong to the museum's Facebook community of enlightened citizens, and perhaps to display this identity by joining the conversation now and again with a verbal utterance or the minimal discourse marker of the Facebook 'like'. Some may be driven by a wish to share a museum experience with others, or just to pass time in a playful, entertaining and perhaps enriching manner. Without necessarily giving much thought to it, they may thereby affirm, through discursive visibility, their cultural capital, cultural identity and self-esteem. Here the algorithms of Facebook can play the role of 'third author' in where and how a communicative action, such as pressing the like button, is displayed to other Facebook users (Eisenlauer 2014).

The museum's general motivations for taking an active role in the Facebook universe derive from the general drivers that operate in an increasingly mediatized culture (as briefly outlined above) and include the visible maintenance and innovation of their established brand in the community, both vis-à-vis loyal and prospective visitors and in relation to policy-makers and funding bodies.

These premises and motivations can be hypothesized to form the basis of the 'recipient design' of museums and their Facebook followers when they plan and articulate their contributions to the ongoing Facebook conversations. The participants' Facebook interaction becomes 'constructed or designed in ways which display an orientation and sensitivity to the particular and more general other(s) who are receiving or co-participating in this electronic communication' (Meredith and Potter 2014: 372). To analyze such conversations therefore enables us to 'understand the actions *that* discourse does in *that* particular interactional context' (ibid., emphases in the original).

The descriptive conversation analysis below applies a matrix (see Appendix 1), which registers the relevant conversational features in five columns:

**Column 1:** Discursive turns, i.e. a Facebook utterance preceded by the turn number (#), the date and the time of the turn, and the Speaker.

**Column 2:** The discursive function(s) of the turn in the sequence (i.e. the communicative value).

**Column 3:** Time lapse, i.e. the time between a turn and the previous turn in minutes, and an indication of which previous turn it appears to address.

**Column 4:** Brief analytical comments and a registration of any accompanying non-verbal elements.

**Column 5:** A registration of which other verbal turns in the thread are performed by this turn's speaker, and which other turns are 'liked' by the speaker in question.

*Conversation analysis of 'The Drowned Fisherman', The National Gallery of Denmark (Statens Museum for Kunst, SMK), 1-6 February 2013*

1. Discursive turns	2. Discursive function in the sequence	3. Time lapse (mins.) Response to previous turn #	4. Analysis and Non-verbal elements	5. Other turn(s) by the speaker T: Turn(s) L: Like(s)
#1 - 1 February <i>Statens Museum for Kunst (SMK):</i> '(Michael Ancher's) The Drowned Fisherman has been returned to Skagen Museum. The painting has just been 'home' to SMK for a thorough restoration, and now it is ready to be exhibited again.'	Announcement		Matter-of-fact information (the name of the painter has been added after the inquiry in #5)  Photo of the painting	T: 4,6  L: 2,3,5,7,8,9,10
#2 - 1 February, 10:36 <i>Johan O. Sigurdsson:</i> 'Good, and thanks, for this will always be modern!'	Appreciation Taste judgment	n.a.  #1	Brief appreciation of art lover	L: 7
#3 - 1 February, 11:17 <i>Skagens Museum:</i> 'And here it is, exhibited at the museum opening last night - <a href="http://instagram.com/p/VL626SnlJs/">http://instagram.com/p/VL626SnlJs/</a> - more beautiful than any of us has experienced it before.'	Confirming SMK's claim in #1. Expressive	41 mins  #1	Acknowledging the quality of SMK's restauration of the painting  Link to Instagram photo of painting on the wall of Skagens Museum	L: 1,2,4,5,7,9
#4 - 1 February, 11:30 <i>SMK:</i> 'Cool! Best wishes Sarah/digital editor.'	Expressive Appreciation	13 min  #3	'Sarah', personalizes SMK	T: 1,6 L: 2,3,5,7,8, 9,10
#5 - 1 February, 12:21 <i>Inger Sund:</i> 'Name of the artist? Dainty atmosphere in painting.'	Question Expressive	51 min  #1, #3	Speaker does not have the required cultural capital. Value judgment (the name of the painter is added to #1 after this inquiry)	

#6 – 1 February, 12:34 <i>SMK</i> 'That's Michael Ancher. This is an important piece of information so I'll add this to the update (#1) ☺. Have a nice weekend! Best wishes, Sarah(digital editor	Information. Acknowledgement of lapse. Colloquial greeting	13 min #5	Appreciation of Nr 5 (building # 5's positive face with smiley) Sarah personalizes SMK	T: 1,4, L: 2,3,5,7,8, 9,10
#7 – 1 February, 13.22 <i>Eric Marott Hansen:</i> 'It was a great experience to stand face to face with this painting	Expressive: personal impact	58 min #1, #3	Expresses feeling for great art	
#8. – 2 February, 10:35 <i>Jytte Søndergaard:</i> I would love to see it	Wish for art experience	21 hours 13 min #1, #3	Art lover wish	
#9 – 3 February, 09:26 <i>Anne Birkenfeldt Hansen:</i> 'Fantastic painting. I ♥ Skagens Museum'.	Expressive: personal judgement. Expressive: art love	23 hours #1	I am an art lover	L: 1
#10 – 4 February, 16:24 'Schönes Museum dort oben!'	Expressive: personal judgement.	30 hours 58 minutes	I am a museum lover	L: 2
#11 – 6 February, 16:36 <i>Erna Jensen:</i> 'Great paintings which are so alive'.	Expressive: personal judgement	48 hours 12 minutes #1	I am an art lover	L: 1

### The National Gallery Thread: The Co-production of Conversational Coherence

The subject matter dealt with in this thread (1 – 6 February 2013) has to do with the return by the National Gallery of Denmark (referred to as 'SMK' onwards) of a pictorial treasure: 'The Drowned Fisherman' (1896), painted by Michael Ancher, one of the so-called Skagen Painters, a bohemian group of painters named after the provincial fishing town of Skagen, in which the painters resided during the summer months<sup>5</sup>.

The thread consists of 10 verbal turns produced by eight participants, seven of whom participate with one turn while one produces three turns. It starts with SMK making an assertive speech act in the form of an impersonal institutional announcement that Ancher's painting has now been returned to Skagen Museum after restoration by SMK experts. The post is accompanied by a photo of the painting. It is shared by 16 SMK Facebook followers and 'liked' by 202 followers, only one of whom participates later on in the thread with a verbal turn (#9).

Turns #5 and #6 show that the painter's name was not originally mentioned in the initiating posting, a circumstance that bears witness to SMK's imagined community of followers: SMK takes for granted that 'everybody knows' who painted this national treasure. Presumably the



speaker of turn #5 is Norwegian (betrayed by the 'strange' definite form (in Danish) of the noun 'painting', and the use of the adjective 'dainty' instead of 'nice') and therefore not familiar with the painter's name. Only 13 minutes later a personalized SMK representative 'Sarah, digital editor' intervenes with a face-saving gesture, apologizing for the omission by granting that this is 'an important piece of information', which she'll immediately add to the initiating turn (#1). SMK can thus be seen to be keen to make the museum's online followers feel welcome and adequate in its Facebook community.

The thread remains fairly active for approximately 3 hours after SMK's posting, which can be assumed to have appeared in the morning of 1 February, as the first comment appears at 10:36 am. After turn #7 at 13.22 activity decreases, with first one day, then three days between new turns. SMK's last turn occurs on Day One, but it 'likes' all subsequent comments including the last one on Day Three. This, together with the use of a happy smiley in all three turns, signals conversational care and may be a consequence of an explicit museum policy to actively monitor and maintain Facebook follower relations.

In addition to SMK, another institutional communicator appears early on: Skagen Museum, the recipient of the restored Ancher painting, acknowledges receipt of the painting by showing, through an Instagram link, the displayed painting on the wall, and by praising the restorative work performed by SMK ('more beautiful than any of us has experienced it before', #3). Skagen Museum is equally diligent at 'liking' all but three of the comments that follow. The other participants are all private individuals, who contribute one verbal turn each. One of them (#2) Likes a later turn (#7). Two people participate minimally by 'liking' one turn each (#2 and #3), but give no verbal turns.

The overall tone of voice in the thread is educated-polite; the wordings of the expressive turns mimic the appreciative comments one might hear from typical visitors walking through an art exhibition. The general pattern of conversational coherence produced in the thread consists in turns addressing/responding to the two museums' early turns. Except for the mutually congratulating turns of Skagen Museum (#3, where 'And' signals coherence with #1) and SMK (#4), and SMK's apology to the Norwegian woman (#6, which greets her directly wishing her a 'nice weekend'), there are no conversational signals indicating that the participants interact with each other, such as would have been perfectly possible for instance in turn #8, which could easily have been 'I would love to see it *too*' (emphasis added). When participants express their enthusiasm for the painting, they are unilaterally in conversation only with SMK (#1) and/or with Skagen Museum (#3).

All the personal turns are strongly expressive and share an undertone of 'I am an art lover' or 'I know art' (#2, #7, #10). Here lies, perhaps, the main difference between uttering a 'like' and a verbal comment: being one among 202 'likes' you disappear in the crowd and in practice remain unnoticed, whereas by offering even a short verbal comment you invest your identity for assessment by other passers-by, who can judge you on the appropriateness or wit of your comment and acknowledge it with a 'like' of their own.

Altogether the conversational thread spawned by the SMK's notification about 'The Drowned Fisherman' can be characterized as fairly standard among museum postings. It serves to maintain the impression of sustained communicative activity on the SMK Facebook page, and succeeds in creating a fair amount of publicity for the transfer of the masterpiece to its natural home in Skagen (the 16 'shares' and the 202 'likes'). The thread does not evoke – and is presumably not intended to evoke – a lengthy engaged conversation, but with its modest level of visitor applause rises above mere notice-board status for the undoubtedly numerous SMK followers who remain in the role of an invisible overhearing audience. At the same time, it attracts attention to the Facebook page by creating activities on speakers' walls and in speakers' friends' newsfeeds, thereby inviting a broader audience to become part of the conversation.

## Discussion

In our analysis, we have investigated communicative actions as isolated, relational speech acts and the micromechanics of the interaction that potentially arise from such actions. In light of the analysis, we may ask what modes of participation the interaction affords: to what extent do

the communicative actions of museums invite followers to participate? And how do followers engage with museums on Facebook and negotiate this participatory relationship? However, we need to be precise about what we label 'participation' in order not to gloss over imbalances and asymmetrical power relations within allegedly participatory activities, as pointed out by Carpentier (2015). According to Carpentier, 'participation' is inherently linked to equalized power positions between actors in a decision-making process, and it is this link to power that distinguishes 'participation' from other kinds of relationships such as 'access' and 'interaction'.

Initially Facebook began as a network for interpersonal communication and while this is still its main feature, it can now also accommodate institutional communication in the form of institutional pages, in our case from museums, to which followers can subscribe. However, this is no longer networked communication among equals, but communication between the privileged actors of the museum staff, as administrators of the museum Facebook page, and ordinary, non-privileged users.

This asymmetrical relationship is evident in the patterns of interaction in our findings. The initiative of posting lies almost exclusively with the museums; the postings of followers get no or a delayed response from the museum, except when they praise the museum in expressive speech acts. Even though the followers have the opportunity of posting on the Facebook page of a museum (except for the two museums that foreclosed this option), few grasp this opportunity. It may naturally be quite appropriate that museums are the primary contributors to their own Facebook page, and we can plausibly assume that the followers have liked the museum page in order to receive information about the museum, and not from other followers. It is possible, however, that entirely different conversations about museums and museum experiences transpire between followers and their friends on their personal pages, where they are in charge and without the museum even realizing it. For members of the public, museums' Facebook pages may not be the obvious choice for a meaningful conversation about museums, unless you deliberately want to engage with the museum. As illustrated in the conversation analysis of 'The Drowned Fisherman', followers do not consider themselves participants in a community with other followers when engaging with museums on Facebook. Our findings thus on the whole confirm Kidd's concern (2014: 43) that museums' current use of social media 'can neutralize, contain and flatten' the promise of a genuinely participatory reorientation. The analysis shows that this neutralization can happen on the basic level of speech acts and that the interaction on this level is clearly patterned. The choice of speech act in addressing your followers can either foreclose interaction or encourage it, if the followers are genuinely invited to contribute. An increased awareness of how this basic linguistic choice offers different scopes for participation when addressing your followers is essential for successful institutional communication on Facebook.

## Conclusion

By examining a corpus of conversational activities from the Facebook pages of nine museums of different types and sizes collected during eight consecutive weeks in 2013, this article has studied museums' and their followers' speech acts and the coherent interactions they enable. Our findings show that the most commonly used initiating speech acts by museums as well as followers were directives, assertives and expressives, in that order. Significantly, this is different from what was found in other Facebook studies of speech acts in interpersonal communication, where expressive speech acts were predominant (Carr et al. 2012; Ilyas and Khushi 2012). We believe that these results can be explained by the institutional character of the communication. However, the communication on the museum Facebook pages showed several non-institutional features, such as the use of humor and personalized sender signatures from museum employees.

Also, we found that museums were much more active in initiating interaction with followers than followers were in initiating interaction with museums. However, while museums were often active in threads they themselves had initiated, they regularly failed to respond, or their response was – sometimes considerably – delayed, when followers initiated threads. In general, museum initiated threads were more engaged (with several or even numerous participants) and more complex in using a varied range of communicative actions and facilitating one-to-

one, one-to-many and many-to-many communication. In contrast, follower initiated threads generated little or no interaction. Thus, the patterns of interaction on the museum Facebook pages display an asymmetrical power relationship between the privileged institution and its followers. Evidently, followers do not consider themselves participants in a community with other followers when engaging with museums on Facebook.

In methodological and analytical terms, this research adds to the existing literature on Facebook by studying institutional interaction in the form of museums' Facebook page activities generated by museum employees and followers. In most studies of Facebook, communicative actions and their microdynamics have not been in focus, and the very few communicative studies of Facebook have analyzed interpersonal communication, not institutional communication. Even fewer studies have applied an interaction perspective. Thus, our findings have implications for recent discussions about how museums can adapt to the participatory paradigm by adjusting how they communicate and engage with their followers on social media transforming them from an audience into a community. Frequently, such discussions are carried out without paying detailed attention to the actual communicative practices that are accomplished. We have provided empirical evidence for these practices and their significance for community building in the institutional Facebook communication of museums.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> This work was supported by the Danish Agency for Science, Technology and Innovation (grant #09-0632745).
- <sup>2</sup> The data set was gathered in collaboration with another research group, which had a different research interest. In this article, we analyze the data in line with speech act theory and conversational analysis to investigate patterns of interaction. The other group has analyzed the data using discourse analysis to examine co-construction of museums and audiences (anonymized reference, 2015).
- <sup>3</sup> For the purpose of this article, the quotations from Facebook have been idiomatically translated from Danish to English by the authors. If another language than Danish is used in original messages, this is mentioned in the analysis. All status messages were analyzed in their original language before translation. We show the first example in the form of a screenshot from Facebook in order to sensitize readers to the actual materiality of the Facebook interaction we are analyzing. Other examples are simply quoted in their verbal form.
- <sup>4</sup> Our analysis follows the example of Page et al. (2013) in acknowledging the Facebook 'like' as a full conversational turn, with full communicative weight, but we do not distinguish between the range of different communicative acts that speakers can convey by using a 'like' (Lee 2014).
- <sup>5</sup> <http://www.skagensmuseum.dk/en/collection/the-art-works/michael-ancher/the-drowned-fisherman/>

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## Authors

**\*Ditte Laursen**, Ph.D, Senior Researcher, The Royal Library, Copenhagen, Denmark, [dila@statsbiblioteket.dk](mailto:dila@statsbiblioteket.dk)

Ditte Laursen is senior researcher at the Royal Library in Copenhagen, Denmark. She earned her Ph.D. in Media Studies from University of Southern Denmark, 2006, specializing in young people's mobile phone communication. In 2009, she combined her curator position with a postdoctoral research position at DREAM (Danish Research Centre of Advanced Media materials) with a project on implementation of digital technologies in museums. Current interests are digital archiving, social interaction in, around, and across digital media, and users' engagement with museums and libraries. She is the author or co-author of numerous publications on these topics, all published in international peer-reviewed journals and anthologies.

**\*\*Christian Hviid Mortensen**, Ph.D, Media Heritage Curator at the Media Museum, Denmark, [CHRHM@odense.dk](mailto:CHRHM@odense.dk)

Christian Hviid Mortensen is a curator of media heritage at the Media Museum, Odense, Denmark (since 2007). He holds a PhD from the University of Southern Denmark with the thesis 'Displaying Sound. Radio as Media Heritage in a Museological Context' (2014). He has published in international peer-reviewed journals such as *Curator - The Museum Journal*, *International Journal of Heritage Studies* and *Journal of Interactive Humanities*. Christian is a co-editor of *MedieKultur: Journal for Media and Communication Research*.

**\*\*\*Anne Rørbæk Olesen**, PhD, Independent researcher, Roskilde University, [annerorbaek@gmail.com](mailto:annerorbaek@gmail.com)

Anne Rørbæk Olesen earned her PhD at the Danish Research Centre on Education and Advanced Media Materials (DREAM) and Roskilde University, Denmark. Her research focuses on digital communication, design practices, museums, culture and visual methods.

**\*\*\*\* Kim Christian Schrøder** (Corresponding author)  
 ,Professor, Department of Communication, and Arts,  
 Roskilde University,

Phone (45) 4674 3808.  
[kimsc@ruc.dk](mailto:kimsc@ruc.dk)

Postal address: Building 43.3, Universitetsvej 1, DK-4000 Roskilde, Denmark

Kim Christian Schrøder is Professor of Communication at the Department of Communication, Roskilde University, Denmark. His co-authored and co-edited books in English include *Audience transformations: Shifting audience positions in late modernity* (2014), *Museum communication and social media: The connected museum* (2013), and *Researching audiences* (2003). His current research interests comprise the theoretical, methodological and analytical aspects of audience uses and experiences of media, and the challenges of methodological pluralism